



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 105th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 144

WASHINGTON, FRIDAY, MARCH 6, 1998

No. 22

Senate

S1505

THE SITUATION IN KOSOVO

Mr. BIDEN. I rise today to condemn the murderous attacks carried out by Serbian paramilitary units against civilians in the province of Kosovo .

Mr. President, the immediate cause of the violence was an attack several days ago by units of the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army, which killed four Serbian police. The fundamental cause, however, is the Serbian government s brutal repression of the ethnic Albanians, who make up more than ninety percent of Kosovo s population.

In 1989, Slobodan Milosevic, as part of his demagogic policy of whipping up Serb ultra-nationalism, abolished the autonomous status of Kosovo , granted by the Yugoslav Constitution of 1974.

Flooding the province with Yugoslav military units, special police forces, and nationalist militias, Milosevic set up a police state that has prevented the ethnic Albanians from exercising their basic political and cultural rights.

To their credit, Kosovo s Albanian leadership, led by Ibrahim Rugova, opted for a non-violent approach in their struggle for independence. They established alternative institutions, including a shadow parliament with various political parties, independent schools, and trade unions.

For eight years Mr. Rugova was able to keep the lid on a potentially explosive situation. Inevitably, however, the weight of Serbian repression had its effect, particularly on younger Kosovars, as the ethnic

Albanians of Kosovo are called.

A so-called Kosovo Liberation Army was formed, and last year began an armed campaign against Serbian officials and ethnic Serb civilians. While this development is understandable, Mr. President, it is regrettable. Aside from causing casualties and deaths, the armed resistance has provided Milosevic the pretext for his brutal crack-down.

The violence in Kosovo could provide the spark to ignite the Balkan tinderbox into full-scale regional war, which, in the worst case, could bring in neighboring Albania, Macedonia--and perhaps even Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey.

Immediate action is necessary. Already the Administration is consulting with our NATO allies about an appropriate response. One immediate step should be to extend the mandate of the NATO-led UNPREDEP, the U.N. preventive deployment force in neighboring Macedonia which includes several hundred American troops, beyond its August 1998 termination date.

The Clinton Administration has already revoked several concessions granted to Milosevic as a reward for support of the new Prime Minister of the Republika Srpska in Bosnia.

The Bush Administration s Christmas 1992 warning of military action--which meant air strikes against targets across Serbia--unless violence against the Kosovar Albanians stopped, should be restated.

We should mobilize international pressure on Milosevic to restore the pre-1989 autonomy to Kosovo and to the ethnically heterogeneous Vojvodina (voi-voh-DEEN-uh) province in northern Serbia.

To coordinate our policy, President Clinton should name a high-profile Special Representative for dealing with the Kosovo Problem. Our current Special Representative for the former Yugoslavia, Robert Gelbard, is simply stretched too thin to devote adequate time to this explosive situation.

Mr. President, it is difficult to exaggerate the stakes in the current Kosovo violence. A continuation of the Serbian repression and Kosovar Albanian counter-violence could easily spin out of control and endanger the entire Balkan peninsula.

It could undo the recent progress we have made in Bosnia and endanger NATO solidarity.

We must act at once to prevent these developments.